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17 April 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR : Chief of Station, Vietnam

MEMORANDUM FROM: Chief of Base, Nha Trang

SUBJECT : Evacuation of Nha Trang Base

1. Attached is a chronology of the evacuation of Nha Trang Base, covering the period 27 February to 1 April 1975.

2. Several points, problems and lessons are highlighted below for your information and consideration.

A. Base intelligence was vital to the ConGen planning and implementation of evacuation. Firstly, the GVN authorities had decided not to inform the Americans in advance of their abandonment of Kontum and Pleiku and secondly, the ConGen's info from their contacts in MR-2 painted a more optimistic view than warranted. The ConGen has told the COB that he could not have handled the situation without our "inside information." On the other hand, our intelligence did cause some problems, not so much with the ConGen but with some of his subordinates, regarding the seriousness of the situation. The COB was able to deal with this problem by separating the issues to the validity of intelligence and the safety of Americans.

B. As the military situation continued to deteriorate, there was no question that the NVA had overwhelming superiority. The recurring intelligence questions were "will the NVA continue its onslaught?" and "will the ARVN fight?" There were those who felt

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the NVA would be constrained by lengthening supply lines or political considerations, as well as those who thought the ARVN would "fight to the death." All the COB could do was to present the facts and his own realistic assessments repeatedly, in fact, daily as we moved down the wire.

C. In a crunch, only the Base had reliable communications with the provinces. The ConGen had long before ~~since~~ stopped 24-hour coverage. Therefore, the Base provided not only continuous commo to certain ConGen ProvReps, but secure channel via voice code. However, this created problems, as ProvReps have charged that we have misinterpreted their reports and requests, as well as giving them unauthorized orders. This happened in the case of the evacuation of Tuy Hoa. When the COB was instructed to take charge of the evacuation of Phan Thiet, he played it safe by putting a ConGen man on the radio to convey orders.

D. Any evacuation or drawdown of personnel risked creating panic among the locals. Accordingly, the ConGen will always play it on the slow side. Nonetheless, it is possible to stay within ConGen strictures and still play it safe by thinning out early.

E. Late in March the ConGen permitted dependents of local employees who wanted to quit and leave. The Base followed suit. This created certain problems as essential services were being reduced. A particular problem was guards. We met the latter problem by concentrating our personnel to a few locations for residence.

F. You can count on phone services being curtailed or lost in an emergency. For two weeks we relied on portamobiles for commo.

G. As the situation deteriorated, the curfew will be lengthened. It was 2000 hours in Nha Trang. We met this problem by having the communicators and the COB live on the ConGen compound.

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H. While the Base has no regrets or complaints, Nha Trang's drawdown was complicated by the need to assist our colleagues from Danang.

I. Because most aircraft were used to move people, Base had a difficult time moving out official property and personal effects. Our log officer spent most of his life at the airport and managed to move two planeloads, plus nickel-diming another 3,000 lbs. [redacted] deserves credit for saving 90 thousand dollars of official property and moving of the personal effects of at least five PCS officers. (b)(3)

J. Another problem re the local personnel was their anxiety and panic. In fact, the congestion at the ConGen a few days before the full evacuation was caused by FSLs, both ConGen and ours. One of our officers spent his full time for almost a week taking care of such problems. For the POICdoms which were closed, we paid the employees off (severence pay and other benefits gave them a good stake which eased our conscience and gave the FSL a chance for a new start). We also terminated some Nha Trang personnel on RIF and/or voluntary basis for the same reason. As it turned out, only 50 percent of our locals showed up in Saigon. Perhaps, the rest couldn't make it. On the other hand, some might have stayed behind; others who had been paid off might be on their own somewhere. All our locals who are in Saigon have been paid off or reemployed or both.

K. Staff personnel with emotional attachment to a single local or a group of locals can be a problem. The trick is to move them early by fix wing so their single attachment can go with them. Those who worked with larger groups and perforce are emotionally involved must be moved before the crunch. Otherwise, there could be a disaster. At Cam Ranh an officer refused to board a plane reserved only for Americans and TCNs without his two locals. If this was allowed, hundreds of refugees nearby might have stormed the plane. Thanks to the judicious handling by [redacted] serious trouble was averted. (b)(3)

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L. Dependents are usually reluctant to leave at first and some won't leave unless ordered. Almost a week before the end, the city was an ugly place. Get all dependents out before that happens.

M. Most staff personnel won't want to ask to leave, even the ones who are nervous. Command must be exercised to move all but the essential few. There are a lot of jobs which simply disappear or become unnecessary. A good sense of timing is also important. You don't want to move too fast nor to slow. We need not be constrained by political or cover considerations. However, we should be cognizant of the implications of the time of the move, those who interface with liaison and our local staff. COB handled this problem by assigning double duty to some and allowing others to leave.

N. During the week of 17 March, Base began to reduce its files and by 31 March was on a read and burn basis. Because we wished to reduce panic among our local staff, we went very slow in purging the files maintained by our locals. There were essentially four sets of such files: card and subject files maintained on VC which were based on SB info, incident reports provided by Sector and SB, copies of captured VC documents and administrative/logistics files. While these files were not classified per se, they should have been destroyed. We had earlier checked to insure the absence of any classified info and took the calculated risk that we would have time to destroy them at the eleventh hour. In fact, we did not, as time ran out and our local staff disappeared to take care of their families.

O. In terms of final file storage, Base sealed all safes except the vault where all classified went in at night. Therefore, in the final moments we did not have to go around checking where the classified material was being held in the Base.

3. Finally, there will be a lot of confusion, frayed tempers and misinformation. Common sense, discipline and retention of sense of humor were musts. When evacuation was determined to be likely, Base got ready, stayed

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ready and progressively reduced its responsibilities to the exigencies of the situation.

(b)(3)
(b)(6)

Robert Chin

Attachment
Chronology h/w

Distribution
Orig - COS w/att h/w

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